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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Engaging the Diaspora

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On March 13 participants at a United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-sponsored workshop in Nairobi explored ways to engage the Somali Diaspora in making a greater contribution to peace and the development of the country. Intellectuals, civil society representatives and others from the Somali diaspora shared ideas with representatives from Nairobi-based embassies and development agencies. The workshop featured a UNDP study showing the diaspora's significant economic, humanitarian and development contributions. Through private investments in key sectors such as telecommunications, money transfer, airline, education and general merchandise, representatives of the Somali diaspora fuel economic growth in a high-risk and unstable environment. During the workshop, working groups on business, humanitarian, peace building and development discussed challenges and opportunities for diaspora/donor engagement and how the UNDP can work best with all stakeholders for enhanced impact. End Summary.

Clan-Based Diaspora Organizations

2. (SBU) On March 13, a UNDP-sponsored workshop brought together Somali diaspora organizations to discuss opportunities for enhanced donor-Diaspora engagement. According to data presented at the workshop, the diaspora annually remit an estimated \$1.6 billion and \$700 million to Somalia and Somaliland, respectively. Reportedly 40 percent of Somali households receive remittances. Those remittances make up an average of 23 percent of household income. Participants in the workshop included Minnesota-based Somali Family Service, UK-based Nomad International, the Puntland Diaspora Network, Somali Women Diaspora, and the Moora Gaabey Association (named for its members' home district in Bay region, Somalia). All of these organizations are successfully operating in various regions in Somalia. While most of the Somali diaspora associations are ad hoc, some are permanent organizations with formal structures. Like many Somali initiatives, many of the diaspora associations are regional or clan/subclan specific. However, a growing number transcend regional/clan divides to launch need-based projects.

Harnessing Contributions:  
Vital to the Peace Process

3. (SBU) The diaspora community is making significant contributions

in Somalia through remittances to family members, humanitarian and emergency assistance, peace building, and development through charity, trade and investments. Several participants noted frankly that the diaspora was both fueling the conflict and helping to solve it. UK-based Maryan Sheikh Osman is a member of an informal international Somali diaspora network that has contributed to the success of the Djibouti process. During the peace negotiations' most intense periods, Osman said its members held weekly conference calls and meetings to discuss ways to encourage compromise. The group lobbied political actors and negotiators in Djibouti and Somalia encouraging them to be flexible and consider the general good. At one critical point, Osman said, when the talks seemed to be stalling, diaspora network members hired two neutral Somali mediators to help bring the sides together.

14. (SBU) In addition to paying salaries in some of Somaliland's schools and hospitals, Nomad International provided vital medical support to Hargeisa Hospital's emergency room after the October 2008 terrorist attacks. Similarly, Moora Gaabey supports education in Bay and Bakool regions and made a significant contribution to the reopening of Banadir Hospital. Conference participants cited their support for numerous other projects bringing education, health, reconciliation, roads and water to Somalia's various regions.

#### Donor-Diaspora Collaboration -----

15. (SBU) Participants lamented that Somalia's instability and a lack of coordination among diaspora communities have prevented them from maximizing their influence. Some of the recommendations for UNDP-diaspora coordination included

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strengthening Somalis' traditional capacity to resolve conflicts, supporting the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of clan militia, and funding governance and human rights education.

16. (SBU) Participants also noted that there are thousands of highly skilled diaspora who could contribute to Somalia's development. The UNDP highlighted its Qualified Expatriate Somali Technical Support (QUEST) initiative to recruit Somali diaspora with expertise in the development and governance sectors to serve their country. In 2008, the initiative successfully placed 82 diaspora in Somali-based institutions. UNDP has brought in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to remodel the QUEST program. The participants pledged to further support QUEST and other initiatives to reverse Somalia's brain drain.

#### Influencing Government -----

17. (SBU) The diaspora influence government institutions across Somalia. A large number of diaspora professionals have joined the political process via the newly expanded transitional parliament. A workshop presenter estimated that 40 percent of the Somaliland parliament is from the diaspora. He noted as well that TFG Prime Minister Omar Sharmarke is from the diaspora and the newly appointed TFG cabinet features several highly-educated professionals returning to Somalia for the first time in years, in addition to numerous diaspora advisers whom President Sharif and Prime Minister Sharmarke have recruited from abroad. In the previous TFG cabinet under former Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein, ten of fifteen ministers were from the diaspora. In Puntland, recently-elected President Farole hails from the diaspora, as well.

18. (SBU) During a March 17 meeting (septel), President Sharif told the Ambassador that the Somali Diaspora is critical to the success of the peace process. Sharif said he had asked the PM to appoint a Minister of Diaspora Outreach (Abdullahi Ahmed Abdulle Azari) to explore new ways for the diaspora to contribute to the reconciliation process. Sharif asked us for programs that would enable his government to better engage the diaspora. Sharif cited a retired Somali IMF officer who is working closely with the government to establish new fiscal policies and more transparent financial management mechanisms. We encouraged this initiative and

promised to explore innovative ways to tap into U.S. academic institutions, libraries, and other organizations to build personal bi-lateral exchanges.

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